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Escuin Checa, J., & Taylor, L. (2016). Research by Peaceful Means: Methodologies in Peace Psychology. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 22(3), 287-288.

Published in:

Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

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Research by Peaceful Means: Methodologies in Peace Psychology

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Biographical statements

Judith Escuin Checa (MSc) is a PhD student at Queen's University Belfast. She completed her undergraduate degree in Political Sciences and Public Administration in Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona (Spain) and an MSc in Political Psychology in Queen's University Belfast (Northern Ireland), graduating as the top performing student in both cases. She is currently researching the influence of language and schooling systems in identity building processes in divided societies.

Laura K. Taylor, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the School of Psychology at Queen's University, Belfast. She earned a dual doctorate in Psychology and Peace Studies from the University of Notre Dame. Her research employs mixed methods to examine the impact of political violence on children, families, and communities. With over two dozen peer-reviewed publications, her work appears in the *Journal of Peace Research*, *Social Development*, and *Political Psychology*, among other journals.

Methodologies in Peace Psychology (Bretherton & Law, 2016) offers a multidisciplinary perspective on the relation between research and methodologies, making it a useful read not only for those interested in peace psychology, but also for all researchers

and practitioners interested in mixed and participative methods. The edited volume offers a multifaceted approach to the topic, incorporating global authors with different backgrounds and perspectives who are at diverse stages of their academic careers. Thus, it complements a traditional Western-focused approach, making a unique contribution to the literature.

The book is structured in three main parts. First, it focuses on the theoretical background behind peace psychology research, or ‘the study of mental processes and behaviors that lead to violence, prevent violence, and facilitate nonviolence as well as promoting fairness, respect, and dignity for all’ (p. 19) including healing the psychological effects of violence. This section includes a comprehensive guide of the quantitative and qualitative methods most frequently used in the subject before discussing mixed methods and the ethics in research dimension, which is essential to incorporate in peace studies. The second part provides specific examples of studies that complement and expand the theories considered during the first part, both in terms of general paradigms and specific research methods. Finally, the third part focuses on the impact that peace psychologists’ work and their methodological approaches can have on international public policy, from design to its evaluation, promoting the idea of a high-impact peace scholarship.

Methodologies in Peace Psychology offers insightful conceptual points complemented with real research examples that highlight nuances in different contexts. For example, the volume includes indigenous approaches and post-colonial research paradigms that emphasize the importance of participative research. Chapters also debate and explore the distinctions between different types of violence and peace-making and peace-building interventions. Furthermore, the chapters provide an exposition of alternative methodologies that include the arts (e.g., music, theatre, PhotoVoice) and social media as research tools that also create a positive impact on the researched communities.

This critical focus on research impact remains as a key theme throughout the entire book, emphasizing the need to collaborate with communities. The editors and authors call on researchers to think critically about the value and benefit for participating communities (i.e., sharing the acquired knowledge, positively affecting their contexts), rather than only on academic success. A second key theme that underlies all of the chapters is the need to tailor both the theoretical assumptions and the methodologies in peace psychology to each context, which has a paramount role in the results and impact of the research carried out.

Following this idea, future work could complement the current volume by focusing on methodologies that assess change over time. That is, given the importance of contextual influences, and the notion that peace is a process that is built within communities, a discussion of research methods that can account for these types of nested designs (e.g., individuals within communities or schools) and change over time, would be an important extension to the current volume. This approach would deepen the focus on *Methodologies in Peace Psychology* to better understand the processes through which individuals in each context may contribute to positive social changes that can ultimately reshape their society.

Bretherton and Law have compiled and cultivated an immensely useful book not only for psychologists interested in mixed methods, but also for those interested in expanding their understanding about how peace psychology is researched in other contexts with innovative methodologies. This edited volume also highlights another important area of work for peace psychologists beyond research: designing and evaluating public policies and programs for positive and transformative impacts.

Word count: 600